

June 29, 1948

MEMORANDUM

Subject: Should the President call Congress back?



This election can only be won by bold and daring steps, calculated to reverse the powerful trend now running against us. The boldest and most popular step the President could possibly take would be to call a special session of Congress early in August. We make the following points:

1. This would focus attention on the rotten record of the 80th Congress, which Dewey, Warren and the press will try to make the country forget.
2. It would force Dewey and Warren to defend the actions of Congress, and make them accept the Congress as a basic issue.
3. It would keep a steady glare of publicity on the Neanderthal men of the Republican party, the reactionary men such as Martin, Halleck, Wolcott, Allen, who will embarrass Dewey and Warren. The press is with us on the 80th Congress issue, and the Martins, Hallecks, Wolcotts, Tabers are bound to stir up severe criticism.
4. It would split the Republican Party on the major questions of how to deal with housing, inflation, foreign policy, social security, etc.
5. It would give President Truman a chance to follow through on the fighting start he made on his Western tour. It would show the President in action on Capitol Hill, fighting for the people, delivering messages to Congress at joint sessions in person, broadcasting his messages, leading his party in a crusade for the millions of Americans ignored by the "rich man's Congress."

This course may be hazardous politically, but we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that President Truman faces an uphill fight to win the coming election--and the American people love a fighting leader who takes bold action to help the ordinary citizens against the lobbies and the corporations.

Here are the objections to the special-session plan, and the answers as we see them:

1. The Danger:
Republicans may invite a Southern filibuster by introducing strong civil rights legislation.
The Answer:
The President or Senator Barkley, after the President's nomination, could call in the Southern members of Congress and make it plain to them that they stand in extreme danger of losing their patronage, their positions of power in the party, and their prestige in the event of a Republican victory.

If the Southerners are recalcitrant at this meeting, the President might announce that he will call for a coalition of liberal Democrats and liberal Republicans to pass moderate civil rights legislation, and that he will ask Senator O'Mahoney to introduce a bill embodying his recommendations to the Congress. He might tell the Southerners that he will go on the radio to announce his position, to explain that he feels that the majority of Democrats and the majority of Americans support his position against a stubborn few.

The chances are that the President will never have to take these

extreme measures. The Republicans may have to go easy on civil rights bills. Joe Grundy and other powerful Republicans are opposed to such legislation.

The election will be won or lost in the Northern, Midwestern and Western states. The South cannot win or lose the election for the Democratic Party. If the President supports the introduction of moderate legislation, beating the Republicans to the punch, the credit would go to Mr. Truman and the Democratic Party even if a few diehard Southern senators try to start a filibuster. Filibusters can be broken.

2. The Danger:

In spite of the Martins, the Tabers, and the Wolcotts, Congress may pass some genuinely good legislation, for which Dewey and Warren would seize credit.

The Answer:

This Congress is so closely controlled by reactionaries and lobbyists that it cannot pass satisfactory bills to stop the disastrous inflation which is frightening the people, or to start construction of the millions of homes needed, or to initiate a more enlightened policy on HEP, or to extend social security.

If one or two good bills are passed under the President's personal prodding, it will be up to the Democratic Publicity Department and campaign speakers to pound it home to the people that the President deserves credit. The President would be leading the fight. Dewey would be standing in the wings, saying: "Yes, we should have some housing legislation. Yes, we should stop inflation. Yes, we should extend social security. Me, too. Me, too!"

3. The Danger:

Congress might pass phony bills on housing, price control, aid to education, national health, etc., which might fool the people.

The Answer:

On the issue of price control, which will be the hottest issue of this campaign, the Congress cannot possibly act. The present Congress cannot take any steps to curb prices or to prevent the people from watching the cost of living go higher and higher and higher. This Congress is run by men who cannot pass price-control legislation without losing their financial backers and incurring the wrath of the N.A.M., the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and other such groups.

On housing, education, social security, health—the answer is the same. This Congress cannot meet the critical needs of the country. It is tied up by the rich interests which expect to make a killing after the Republican victory in November—if they get that victory.



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